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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Programme of work for 2009

I. Mandate of the Committee

1. The mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for 2009 is contained in General Assembly resolutions 63/26, 63/27 and 63/28 of 26 November 2008.

2. In its resolution 63/26, entitled "Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People", the General Assembly expressed its appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its efforts in performing the tasks assigned to it by the Assembly and took note of its annual report,[1] including the conclusions and valuable recommendations contained in chapter VII thereof; and requested it to continue to exert all efforts to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, to support the Middle East peace process and to mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people and authorized it to make such adjustments in its approved programme of work as it might consider appropriate and necessary in the light of developments and to report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-fourth session and thereafter. It also requested the Committee to continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to report and make suggestions to the Assembly, the Security Council or the Secretary-General, as appropriate. It further requested the Committee to continue to extend its cooperation and support to Palestinian and other civil society organizations and to continue to involve additional civil society organizations in its work in order to mobilize international solidarity and support for the Palestinian people, particularly during this critical period of humanitarian and financial crisis, with the overall aim of promoting the achievement by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. The Assembly invited all Governments and organizations to extend their cooperation to the Committee in the performance of its tasks and requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Committee with all the necessary facilities in that regard.

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/63/35).

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3. In its resolution 63/27, entitled "Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat", the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources and to ensure that it continued to carry out its programme of work as detailed in the relevant earlier resolutions, in consultation with the Committee and under its guidance, including, in particular, the monitoring of developments relevant to the question of Palestine, the organization of international meetings and conferences in various regions with the participation of all sectors of the international community, liaison and cooperation with civil society, the further development and expansion of the documents collection of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), the preparation and widest possible dissemination of publications and information materials on various aspects of the question of Palestine and the conduct of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority. The Assembly also requested the Division, as part of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November, to continue to organize, under the guidance of the Committee, an annual exhibit on Palestinian rights or a cultural event in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations and encouraged Member States to continue to give the widest support and publicity to the observance of the Day of Solidarity.

4. In its resolution 63/28, entitled "Special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat", the General Assembly requested the Department, in full cooperation and coordination with the Committee, to continue, with the necessary flexibility as might be required by developments affecting the question of Palestine, its special information programme for the biennium 2009-2010, and outlined a number of specific activities to be carried out under the programme.

5. The Committee has reviewed the various aspects of its own programme of work and that of the Division for Palestinian Rights, as well as of the mandates governing them. It will continue to make adjustments in this programme in the course of 2009 in order to enhance its responsiveness to developments in the peace process and the situation on the ground, as well as to increase its effectiveness in promoting the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights.

II. The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem

6. The first three weeks of 2009 were marked by the Israeli military invasion of the Gaza Strip. In the more than three weeks of relentless Israeli bombardment and ground offensive, more than 1,300 Palestinians were killed and more than 5,300 injured. The majority of victims were Palestinian civilians, including many children and women. Among the casualties were also United Nations staff and medical and humanitarian personnel. In addition to the loss of innocent life caused, the Israeli military assault caused massive destruction and damage to Palestinian homes, properties and infrastructure, including some 21,000 homes, thousands of businesses and power, water, sanitation, medical, education and agricultural infrastructure. More than 50 United Nations facilities were also destroyed or damaged by the Israeli bombardment. This unprecedented military onslaught followed many months of a suffocating Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, during

which all border crossings were closed and only an absolute minimum of humanitarian aid was allowed to pass into the Territory, causing severe shortages of all basic and essential supplies, including food, medicine and fuel, causing a dramatic rise in poverty, unemployment, hunger and disease. Israel explained its military operation and the continued closure of crossings by the need to ensure its security and stop rocket fire by Palestinian militants. The Committee has condemned Israel's military operations against the Palestinian civilian population. It has also denounced rocket attacks on Israel and has called for the cessation of these activities by Palestinian armed groups. The Committee strongly condemns the killing of innocent civilians by either side.

7. The Security Council and the General Assembly immediately engaged the parties and the international community with a view to stopping the military activities and violence and working towards a long-term solution of the conflict. In this regard, on 8 January 2009, the Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009), and the Assembly, on 16 January 2009, at its resumed tenth emergency special session, adopted resolution ES-10/18. The conflict in the Gaza Strip seriously disrupted the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on a permanent settlement of the conflict which had relaunched in late 2007 following the Annapolis conference.

8. The Committee has stressed that Israel was waging the military aggression in the Gaza Strip in contravention of international humanitarian and human rights law and United Nations resolutions, and without regard for the life, safety and well-being of the Palestinian civilian population already suffering from more than 40 years of occupation. The Committee reminded Israel that under the Fourth Geneva Convention an occupying Power is obligated to protect the civilian population under its occupation, including through the provision of basic services, such as food and medicines. Israel's prolonged closure of the border crossings, which has obstructed the free movement of persons and goods, including access of humanitarian aid and personnel, and stifled any normal economic life, is a clear violation of the Convention. In this regard, it is clear that the Gaza Strip remains a part of the Occupied Territory by virtue of the fact that Israel fully controls the borders, airspace, naval waters and every single aspect of the daily life of the Palestinian population.

9. The Committee emphasized in its report to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session that, despite the resumption of the political process and intensified international engagement during 2008, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, remained a cause of great concern. Throughout the year, the Israeli army continued to conduct military operations in Palestinian population centres in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, causing the deaths and injuries of many Palestinian civilians. Israeli actions included extrajudicial killings, house demolitions and arrests. The Government of Israel, in violation of international law, United Nations resolutions and its obligations under the road map, also continued to construct and to expand Israeli settlements, including in and around East Jerusalem. The unlawful construction of the wall on Palestinian land also continued in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/ES-10/273 and Corr.1). The number of Israeli checkpoints throughout the West Bank exceeded 600, severely restricting freedom of movement of people and goods, isolating East Jerusalem from the rest of the Territory, stifling Palestinian economic activity and further worsening the daily hardships experienced by the Palestinian population.

10. The Committee reiterates that, without real improvement in the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the negotiations will be doomed to failure, since the two are clearly linked and mutually reinforcing, and reminds Israel, the occupying Power, of its obligations under international law. The continuation of unlawful policies of creating facts on the ground pose a grave threat to the prospects for a just and peaceful negotiated solution of the conflict. Moreover, they preclude any possibility of improving the economic and humanitarian situation and are making a two-State solution virtually impossible to achieve.

11. The Committee is strongly opposed to the illegal construction and expansion of settlements, as well as the unlawful construction of the wall in the West Bank, including in and around East Jerusalem, and finds these activities incompatible with negotiations on the permanent settlement. The Committee is also of the view that Israel must release, immediately and unconditionally, all Palestinian prisoners, including children, women and imprisoned members of the Cabinet and the Palestinian Legislative Council. The Committee also stresses the need for Israel, the occupying Power, to cease all measures of collective punishment of the Palestinian people, which it has been imposing in direct contravention of international law.

12. The Committee's position is that the illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory must end without conditions, which should allow the Palestinian people to establish an independent State on all territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and to exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination. The Committee firmly supports the two-State solution based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). The Committee is convinced that only serious and sustained international engagement will bring about a peaceful and negotiated settlement of all outstanding issues and reverse the growing support for radical forces that promote violent and unilateral approaches to ending the conflict, for which there is no military solution. Moreover, any diplomatic process needs to be buttressed by urgent and meaningful steps on the ground.

13. The Committee remains concerned about the internal Palestinian divisions blocking national unity of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under the Palestinian Authority. It expresses support for all efforts of Arab and other countries, as well as the initiatives of the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, aimed at promoting reconciliation and restoring Palestinian national unity, which are essential if progress is to be made towards the achievement of a permanent settlement of the question of Palestine. It is of paramount importance that the various Palestinian factions put the national interests and aspirations of the Palestinian people ahead of any partisan concerns.

14. The Committee is deeply concerned about the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip as a result of the Israeli invasion. Basic services have to be restored immediately and aid agencies, including the United Nations, should have unhindered and safe access to the Gaza Strip. It is imperative to embark without delay on the process of recovery and reconstruction of the thousands of destroyed and damaged homes, schools, hospitals and vital civilian infrastructure. The isolation of the Gaza Strip from the rest of the Palestinian Territory and from the international community has to be lifted with the opening of crossings, and concrete measures must be put into place to restore normal economic activity. Israel, the occupying Power, is obliged to create the necessary conditions, including

reparations for reconstruction of civil structures destroyed during the war. The international community, which has a long history of consistent support of the Palestinian Authority, should contribute to the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and should continue development projects in the West Bank. The Committee, in that regard, emphasizes the critical importance of international donor assistance for the functioning of the Palestinian institutions at this time of crisis. It urges the international donor community to continue providing assistance and to address the humanitarian and economic situation in the Gaza Strip as a matter of urgency.

15. The Committee reaffirms that the United Nations should play an active and facilitating role in these efforts and maintain its permanent responsibility with respect to all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and norms of international law. As requested by the General Assembly, the Committee will continue to keep the situation under review and to promote a constructive analysis and discussion of these issues by the international community.

III. Priority issues in the programme of work of the Committee for 2009

16. The Committee considers that its own work and the programme of mandated activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights represent a significant contribution by the United Nations and its membership to the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting peaceful solution of the question of Palestine in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. The Committee will continue to work towards heightening international awareness of the various aspects of the question of Palestine, international support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. Throughout 2009, its work will remain focused on promoting a better understanding, as gauged by international public opinion, of the importance of the achievement by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, namely, the right to self-determination, the right to an independent, sovereign State and the right of return, as well as the urgency of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine.

17. As in previous years, the Committee will maintain its support of the Palestinian people and the political process through a variety of its activities. The Committee intends to contribute to the assessment of the situation in the Gaza Strip following the conflict and crisis, including the humanitarian and economic emergencies. More specifically, the Committee will focus on the issues of alleviating the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, stimulating Palestinian economic recovery and urging expanded international assistance to the Palestinian people. It will draw attention to the plight of Palestinian women and children, the most vulnerable segment of Palestinian society, who are suffering as a result of the occupation and the conflict in the Gaza Strip. The Committee will highlight the responsibility of the occupying Power for ending its illegal policies and practices, especially the settlement activity, the construction of the wall and various measures of collective punishment. The Committee will maintain its support for revitalized and active international involvement, including through the Quartet, the regional partners and the continued personal engagement of the Secretary-General of the

United Nations and the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

18. The Committee attaches great importance to enhancing cooperation and coordination between the Department of Public Information and the Division for Palestinian Rights in the implementation of their respective mandates. In its resolution 63/28, the General Assembly requested the Department, inter alia, to continue to issue and update publications on the various aspects of the question of Palestine in all fields, including materials concerning relevant recent developments, in particular the efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. The Committee will continue to cooperate with the Department in carrying out the various mandated activities.

19. The Committee will continue to make an effort to encourage participation by countries and organizations that so far have not engaged fully in its programme of work.

IV. Activities of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights

A. Action by the Committee

20. In pursuance of its mandate, the Committee will continue to keep the situation relating to the question of Palestine under review and to participate in relevant meetings of the General Assembly and the Security Council. The Committee will also continue to monitor the situation on the ground and draw the attention of the international community to urgent developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, requiring international action.

21. The Committee, through its Bureau, will continue to participate in relevant intergovernmental and other conferences and meetings, as necessary. The Committee considers this activity an important aspect of its work in promotion of international support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

22. In cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, the Committee will continue to maintain contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Palestinian Authority and other institutions, including civil society, in the areas under its jurisdiction and in the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Following the practice of previous years, the Committee will continue to invite Palestinian officials and other Palestinian personalities to meetings with members and observers of the Committee and the Secretariat, as appropriate.

23. The Bureau of the Committee will continue consultations with Governments and intergovernmental organizations interested in its programme of work. These exchanges should help promote understanding of the mandate and objectives of the Committee.

B. International meetings and conferences

24. The Committee considers that its programme of international meetings and conferences contributes to focusing the attention of Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations and the general public on the need to advance a peaceful settlement of the conflict and to mobilize much-needed assistance to the Palestinian people. The meetings should also address ways in which the international community could help the parties in their efforts to resolve the conflict in a just and comprehensive manner, and to raise international awareness of the root cause of the conflict, namely, the occupation by Israel of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. These events will highlight the most pressing issues, such as the need to end violence, protect the civilian population, stop settlement activities and the construction of the wall, and improve the living conditions of the Palestinian population.

25. In its programme of meetings for 2009, the Committee intends to address such issues as the need to alleviate humanitarian and socio-economic hardships, including the plight of Palestinian women and children, with particular focus on the urgent need to support the process of recovery, rebuilding and reconstruction in the Gaza Strip; the collective international responsibility to protect the Palestinian people and the need to uphold international humanitarian law; and the responsibilities of Israeli political and military decision makers for their actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The Committee will also highlight the adverse consequences of the unlawful settlement policy and the construction of the wall vis-à-vis the achievement of a two-State solution. The Committee will work towards the continuation of the political dialogue between the parties aimed at achieving a permanent settlement of the question of Palestine. It will emphasize the significance of bringing about a tangible improvement in the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the urgent need for all stakeholders, including the United Nations, to remain engaged in all aspects of the question of Palestine.

26. In 2009, the Committee, in cooperation with prospective host countries, organizations and relevant Secretariat services, will do its utmost to ensure the success of its programme of meetings and conferences. In so doing, it will keep in mind the need for economy and the most cost-effective utilization of resources. The Committee highly appreciates the involvement in these events of Governments, intergovernmental organizations, entities of the United Nations system and civil society. It encourages them to continue and increase the level of engagement and support for a just solution to the conflict. The Committee will continue to carry out this programme to foster support for the attainment by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights in accordance with international legitimacy. The Committee, through its Bureau, will regularly assess the outcomes of the international meetings and conferences and, where required, decide on steps that could be taken to enhance their contribution to the mandated goals of the Committee.

27. In 2009, the Committee intends to organize the following international meetings and conferences:

- United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, Cairo, February 2009.

- United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, Nicosia, April 2009. The meeting will be followed by consultations of the Committee delegation with civil society organizations.
- United Nations Asian and Pacific Meeting on the Question of Palestine. The meeting will be followed by a civil society event in solidarity with the Palestinian people.
- United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace.

C. Cooperation with intergovernmental organizations

28. In the course of 2009, the Committee will continue to cooperate on issues relevant to its mandate with the African Union, the European Union, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Representatives of these organizations and groupings will be invited to lend their support to and participate in the Committee's programme of international meetings and conferences.

D. Cooperation with civil society

Civil society organizations

29. The Committee commends civil society organizations for their efforts to uphold international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine through advocacy and mobilizing public opinion, as well as for their humanitarian and assistance initiatives aimed at alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people and improving their living conditions. The Committee welcomes initiatives aimed at promoting the implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions. The Committee encourages civil society organizations to harmonize their advocacy efforts at the local, national, regional and international levels with respect to the legal obligations of Governments, including parliaments, as regards the question of Palestine. The Committee also supports all humanitarian and assistance initiatives geared towards improving the daily lives of the Palestinian people. The Committee considers that it is particularly important to build bridges of understanding and trust between the Israeli and Palestinian civil societies and to promote common goals of peace between the two peoples.

30. The Committee intends to continue to invite civil society organizations to all international meetings and conferences organized under its auspices. The participation in such meetings of civil society organizations along with Governments and intergovernmental organizations should offer a unique opportunity to promote the exchange of views and ideas, as well as develop and strengthen initiatives by all strata of the international community, with a common objective of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. The Committee believes that the meetings and conferences organized under its auspices promote Israeli-Palestinian civil society dialogue and offer a unique platform for interaction between the two sides.

31. The Committee will maintain and further develop its liaison with national, regional and international coordinating mechanisms on the question of Palestine, in

addition to the established liaison with a large number of individual civil society organizations. It will continue to accredit new organizations. Periodic meetings of consultations with civil society representatives will contribute to the further enhancement of the Committee's programme of cooperation with civil society.

32. The Committee is of the view that it is important to continue to exchange information with civil society on respective current and planned activities. The Committee requests the Division to obtain information and report periodically on civil society initiatives in order to enhance the interaction between civil society and the Committee. It also requests the Division to continue to develop and regularly update the "Civil society" page of the "Question of Palestine" website (www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ngo) as a tool for the exchange of information and communication between the United Nations and civil society.

33. In 2009, the resources available for cooperation with civil society will be used for the following activities:

(a) Organization, whenever appropriate and feasible, of meetings of civil society organizations in conjunction with international meetings and conferences held under the auspices of the Committee;

(b) Participation of representatives of the Committee and the Division in important forums and other events on the question of Palestine organized by civil society organizations;

(c) Periodic consultation meetings with civil society organizations with a view to keeping them apprised of the various activities of the Committee, encouraging better coordination and cooperation among them and with the Committee and other relevant United Nations entities, and receiving their views on the work of the United Nations and the Committee in particular;

(d) Providing assistance to Palestinian civil society organizations in facilitating participation of their representatives in meetings held under the auspices of the Committee or supported by the Committee.

Parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations

34. The Committee believes that national parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations play an important role in shaping public opinion, formulating policy guidelines and upholding international legitimacy in support of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. The Committee is of the view that the experience and political influence of lawmakers and their organizations can be instrumental in consolidating the democratic process and institution-building in the territory under the Palestinian Authority, strengthening political dialogue between the parties and applying the principles of international law to efforts aimed at resolving the conflict. The Committee reaffirms the continuing importance of developing closer cooperation with parliaments and representatives of inter-parliamentary bodies in order to encourage the discussion, within the respective parliaments and among all strata of society, of ways of supporting peace in the Middle East and resolving the question of Palestine. To that end, the Committee will strive to involve parliamentarians and representatives of inter-parliamentary organizations in international conferences and meetings organized under its auspices. Consultations between the Committee and representatives of parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations should improve

cooperation between the two sides. The Committee will also make an effort to involve members of the Knesset and the Palestinian Legislative Council in events organized under its auspices. The Committee will devote the international meeting scheduled to take place in Nicosia to the role of European, Arab and other parliamentarians, as well as national parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations, in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace.

E. Publications programme

35. The Committee considers the Division's publications programme to be an important information source and outreach activity which contributes to the heightening of international awareness of the various aspects of the question of Palestine, the involvement of the United Nations and the work of the Committee and its mandate and objectives. The Division should continue to monitor developments relevant to the question of Palestine. It should also continue to issue the following publications:

- Monthly bulletin on action by the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations relevant to the question of Palestine.
- Periodic review of developments relating to the Middle East peace process.
- Monthly chronological review of events relating to the question of Palestine.
- Annual compilation of resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly and the Security Council relating to the question of Palestine.
- Reports of international meetings and conferences held under the auspices of the Committee.
- Annual bulletin on the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.
- Bimonthly summary of civil society activities on the question of Palestine, entitled "NGO Action News", available on the "Civil society" page on the "Question of Palestine" website.

36. The Committee believes that the Division, in consultation with the Bureau, should continue to review the existing publications and make proposals with regard to those that require updating.

F. United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine

37. The Committee requests the Division for Palestinian Rights to continue its work on the further development, expansion and administration of the "Question of Palestine" website, including UNISPAL. The Division intends to finalize its work on the "Question of Palestine" portal designed in consultation with and under the guidance of the Bureau. The Division will continue to ensure that the UNISPAL collection of United Nations and related documents is comprehensive and up to date and that its access modalities and displays are user-friendly. The Committee requests the Division to report periodically to the Bureau on the status of work accomplished on the system and progress achieved in its development.

G. International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

38. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B, the Committee will observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It is envisaged that special meetings in observance of the Day will be held on 30 November 2009 at United Nations Headquarters, the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna and elsewhere, in accordance with established practice. A Palestinian exhibit or a cultural event will be organized at United Nations Headquarters in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations.

H. Training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority

39. The Committee considers that, in the light of its importance and usefulness to the Palestinian Authority, the Division should continue the training programme in 2009. The Committee is of the view that, in selecting candidates for this annual programme, special consideration should be given to achieving gender balance.

I. Continuing review and assessment

40. The Committee will continue to review and assess its programme of work in the light of the situation on the ground and new developments in the political process and will make adjustments as necessary.